

This Week in Congress

November 7, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Working to Increase Travel Reimbursement for Veterans Seeking Medical Care

This week I was joined by more than 50 Members of Congress in asking the House Appropriations Committee to include in the next hurricane relief legislation an increase in travel reimbursement rates to help disabled veterans access health care.

In September, the Internal Revenue Service recommended that public and private employers raise mileage reimbursement rates from 40.5 cents per mile to 48.5 cents in response to high gas prices. Veterans have yet to see relief. Disabled veterans traveling to receive medical care are currently reimbursed at 11 cents per mile, a rate that has not increased since 1977.

This has limited the ability of Kansas veterans to afford trips to the doctor in this time of high gas prices. Higher reimbursement rates are particularly important in rural areas where veterans must travel long distances to receive medical care.

I am also a sponsor of H.R. 4025, the Disabled Veterans Fairness Act, and H.R. 3147, the Veterans Road to Health Care Act, both of which would raise veterans' mileage reimbursement rates to 48.5 cents. Our nation promised veterans accessible health care, and we have a responsibility to keep that promise.

House Passes Legislation to Protect the Rights of Land Owners

This week the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4128, the Private Property Rights Protection Act. This legislation prohibits state and local governments from receiving federal funding if they use eminent domain for private economic development purposes.

This summer, the Supreme Court's decision in *Kelo vs. City of New London* gave local governments greater power in claiming property via eminent domain. This controversial ruling addresses the definition of "public use" as stated in the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution and calls into question more than two centuries of legal precedent. One week after the Supreme Court's decision, I supported a motion in the House of Representatives disagreeing with the Court's ruling.

Eminent domain is meant to be used for taking land for a public use only, such as a road, hospital or military base. H.R. 4128 maintains the original intent of eminent domain and states that Congress should protect the property rights of Americans, including those who reside in rural areas, to prevent eminent domain from being used to take farmland, homes and other rural property for economic development.

Private property rights are essential to our freedom and to the prosperity of Kansans. These rights were recognized by our founding fathers in the Constitution, and we must continue working to uphold them today.

United States One Step Closer to Resuming Beef Exports to Japan

This week the Japanese Food Safety Commission approved a report on Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) that concluded the risk level of U.S. beef is minimal. The report proposes an end to the import ban on U.S. beef 20 months and younger.

A single case of BSE in a Canadian-born animal prompted Japan to close its border to U.S. beef in December 2003. This week's approval comes after a five-month review of the safety of U.S. beef by a Japanese BSE panel. Four weeks of public hearings must now be completed before Japan's Health and Agriculture Ministries can recommend any official action on removing the U.S. beef ban.

This approval brings Japan and the U.S. one step closer to resuming trade of American beef. While it is not a total victory, the Japanese government is moving in the right direction. We will continue our efforts with the hope of having U.S. beef back in Japanese households as soon as possible.

Hearing about Trade from Agriculture Secretary and U.S. Trade Representative

This week I joined Chairman Bob Goodlatte in chairing a hearing of the House Agriculture Committee to review the status of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations of the Doha Trade Round. The Doha Trade Round aims to prevent restrictions in world agriculture markets.

A December WTO conference in Hong Kong will settle trade issues in preparation for reaching an agreement on the Doha Round by next year.

The committee heard testimony from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman. A variety of commodity groups were also represented and discussed how trade policies affect their farmers.

It was important for me to hear from the Secretary and Trade Representative about the status of these trade issues, and to hear from the commodity organizations. The outcome of this trade round will be a significant factor as we work on the 2007 Farm Bill. I will continue to monitor the trade negotiations as they proceed.

Spending Time in Sanford, Kinsley, Dodge City and Paxico

On Monday I stopped at the Sanford elevator, a branch of Golden Valley cooperative, where I visited with area farmers about the effects of high fuel and fertilizer prices. We also discussed improving the safety of an intersection by the local elevator, where Highways 156 and 183 meet. I am contacting the Kansas Department of Transportation in an effort to help the community of Sanford make this corner a four-way stop and reduce the number of accidents occurring there.

I was in Kinsley Monday to speak to senior government and freshman civics classes. I enjoyed interacting with these high school students as we discussed several current issues facing our state and nation and how to get involved in politics.

That same day I joined the Dodge City Rotary Club to share an update on activities in Congress. I highlighted the efforts of U.S. officials to reopen Japan's market to American beef imports. I also spoke about the need to reduce the federal deficit and the good news Kansas received with the conclusion of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process - all four Kansas military installations will remain open.

Each of the topics discussed greatly affect the people and economy of Kansas. I enjoyed my time with Dodge City community leaders and appreciate their interest in these important issues facing our state and nation.

I visited the community of Paxico this week as well. Paxico is located off of I-70 and is working to develop into a tourist and antique stop off of the busy interstate. This small community is rebounding after recent completion of construction on I-70. My stops in the community included Mill Creek Valley Junior High and Middle School, the post office, Stockgrowers State Bank, Sisters and Company Antiques, Mike's Lawn Service and Zeke's Trading Post. I enjoyed visiting with the townspeople about their local economy and future development in the area.

Receiving an Award at the 4th Annual Veterans and Military Appreciation Day

This weekend I participated in the Junction City and Geary County 4th Annual Veterans and Military Appreciation Day, sponsored by the Military Affairs Council. I was honored alongside Senator Pat Roberts, Lieutenant Governor John Moore and Major General Dennis Hardy, Fort Riley's Commanding General, for our work representing Fort Riley and its surrounding communities.

Around 600 attended the event, including numerous Junction City and state officials, as well as many area veterans and service members. I would like to thank the Military Affairs Council for hosting this special event in recognition of our veterans and military servicemen and women.

Celebrating the Marriage of Mike Zamrzla and Eunice Henne

This weekend I attended the wedding of one of my district staff representatives, Mike Zamrzla. Mike and Eunice Henne were united in marriage Saturday in Victoria. It was a pleasure to share in their special day and I wish them all the best as they begin their lives together.

In the Office

Representatives of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers were in my office this week to talk about the effects of high fuel and fertilizer costs on Kansas farmers. Representatives included Jerry McReynolds of Woodston, Kendall Hodgson of Little River, Joe Kejr of Brookville, Jay Cook of Garden City and Dusti Fritz of Manhattan.

Carl Reddel and Dan Fiel were in representing the Eisenhower Memorial Commission to discuss the location of a memorial for Dwight D. Eisenhower near the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The commission, of which I am a member, was formed several years ago to develop a memorial in recognition of President Eisenhower. The commission is finalizing the memorial location and is in the beginning stages of architectural development. I am proud to be a part of recognizing the accomplishments of a great Kansan, President Eisenhower.

Earl Watkins and Charles Ayers of Hays were in to provide an update on Sunflower Electric's efforts to bring new power plants to Kansas. In representing America's Promise were Janet Callarman and Nancy Klostermeyer of Salina. As part of the America's Promise organization, Salina was honored earlier this month as one of the 100 Best Communities for young people. Janet and Nancy conducted the research and led the application efforts. I commend them for their work in highlighting the unique attributes of Salina and what it has to offer to young people.

Stephanie Dall of Emporia, Chris Staley of Colby and Kelsey Tankersley of Scott City were in this week with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council. As part of the council, these students were in Washington, D.C., to learn more about the legislative process by participating in a mock Congress. I also enjoyed having Marc Elkins, a friend from college, of Leawood in my office this week.

In my office this week for a tour of the Capitol building were Kip Peterson and Sarah Gronberg of Topeka.

Very truly yours,

Jerry